DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 125 241 FL 006 688

AUTHOR	Cohen, Andrew
TITLE	Successful Immersion Education in North America. Working Papers on Bilingualism, No. 5.
INSTITUTION	Ontario Inst. for Studies in Education, Toronto. Bilingual Education Project.
PUB DATE	Jan 75
NOTE	9p.; For related documents, see FL 006 687-689
AVAILABLE FROM	Bilingual Education Project, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, 252 Bloor St. West, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5S 1V6 (as long as supply lasts)
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Bilingual Education; *Bilingualism; Educational Policy; English (Second Language); French; *Intensive Language Courses; Language Attitudes; *Language Instruction; *Language of Instruction; *Language Programs; Language Research; Mexican Americans; Non English Speaking; *Second Language Learning; Spanish; Spanish Speaking
IDENTIFIERS	*Immersion Programs

ABSTRACT

The success of various French immersion programs in Canada and of one Spanish immersion program for English speakers in Culver City, California, has prompted the author to define "successful" and to attempt to identify ingredients desirable in an immersion program. A tentative 14-point checklist for a successful immersion program is provided, both for English speakers learning through immersion in another language and for non-English speakers learning through English immersion. Nine ingredients which have not been present in the so-called English "immersion" of, for example, Mexican Americans in the U.S. Southwest are identified. Other factors which may mitigate against the success of an immersion education are noted. In conclusion, it is noted that immersion education for non-English speakers is still a research question and needs to draw as much as possible on those ingredients that have made immersion work for the English-speaking child. (Author/AM)

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SUCCESSFUL IMMERSION EDUCATION IN NORTH AMERICA

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ABSTRACT

The success of various French immersion programs in Canada and of one Spanish immersion program for English speakers in Culver City, California, has prompted the author to define "successful" and to attempt to identify ingredients desirable in an immersion program. A tentative 14-point checklist is provided. Nine ingredients which have not been present in the so-called English "immersion" of, say, Mexican Americans in the U.S. Southwest are identified. Other factors which may mitigate against the success of an immersion education program for a particular group of children are noted.

Successful Immersion Education in North America[1]

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In light of recent successes in French immersion education for English speakers in Canada (see Lambert and Tucker, 1972; Swain, 1974), U.S. educators are prone to ask the question, "Why hasn't such immersion education worked for, say, the Chicanos in the American Southwest?" In fact, one immersion program is working in the American Southwest, but it is directed at Anglos rather than at minorities -- the Spanish immersion of Anglos in Culver City (see Cohen, 1974; and Leback, 1974, Boyd, 1974, for the latest findings). It was the success of this program that prompted me to generate a checklist for a successful immersion program. It is true that immersion of non-English speakers in English-only schools has been practised for many years. But this brand of immersion has lacked a series of ingredients which are highly desirable, if not essential, in the new version of immersion -- the one that has proven successful.

First, what does "successful" mean? Successful means the following:

1) The students involved acquire a high level of competency in a second language, while keeping up with peers (who are schooled in the native language) in native language development.
2) They also make normal progress in the content subjects although these are taught primarily, or exclusively, in a second language.
3) Their cognitive or intellectual development shows no signs of a deficit.
4) They develop a healthy attitude toward the second language and toward second-language speakers, while maintaining positive attitudes toward their own language and culture.

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[1] I wish to thank Merrill Swain and Russell Campbell for their helpful comments in the preparation of this paper.

5) They enjoy school and are motivated to continue studying rather than dropping out.

How is this success achieved? The following is a tentative checklist of ingredients desirable in an immersion program. This checklist is intended to apply equally to English speakers learning through immersion in another language and to non-English speakers learning through English immersion. L1 refers to the student's native language and L2 to his second language.

1) All kindergarten students should be monolingual in L1. In essence, the successful program starts as a segregated one linguistically. This segregation is intended to help establish the rules of the game, set the pace, and eliminate the kinds of ridicule and other peer pressures that students exert on less-proficient performers. In immersion education, all learners start off "in the same boat". By the same token, no child need feel he is showing off by speaking L2. He does so as a matter of course. After the rules of the game have been established, then other children can be brought into a class where their L2 abilities are more, or less, advanced than those of the other students without detrimental effects.
2) The teachers are bilingual, although they only speak L2 in the classroom. They need not be native speakers of L2, but must be perfectly fluent in it (i.e., no speaking errors and the correct adult-speaking-to-child register). Particularly if the students are supposed to be getting the message that it is desirable for everyone to be bilingual, then there are advantages to having a blond-haired, blue-eyed teacher be the Spanish-speaking model in a California immersion or bilingual education program.
3) In kindergarten, the children are permitted to speak in L1 and the teacher makes it clear that he understands L1, although he does not speak it. The teacher will often repeat the children's remarks or comment on them in L2.
4) In grade 1 and beyond, the teacher requests that only L2 be spoken in class, except during L1 medium classes (see #12 below). Ideally, a teacher other than the immersion

teacher should teach L1 medium classes so as to keep the languages separated by person, at least in the early grade levels.

5) The teacher must have the expectation that the children will learn L2 through immersion. The children are treated pretty much as if they were native speakers of L2. Teachers consequently speak L2 at a reasonably normal conversational speed. They do not slow down "to make themselves understood".

6) The students do not hear the teachers speaker L1 to each other (except perhaps sometime in second grade and thereafter). If L1-speaking visitors wish to address the teachers in the classroom, the teachers use students to interpret for them. At the kindergarten level -- before the children can perform this task well-- the teacher may step outside with the visitor. Outside of the classroom, the teacher is also careful to use L2 whenever the students are around. Although this procedure may appear to be excessive, it <u>does</u> emphasize to the students that L2 is a language the teachers use -- not just when they "have to" in the classroom.

7) The program follows the regular school curriculum. Sometimes this is difficult if L2 materials are not available in the same series that the school is using for L1 instruction.

8) In the early grades, there are no structured L2 lessons (pattern practice drills, etc.) in class in an attempt to avoid selection and sequencing of structures in a way that is inconsistent with how children actually learn language. L2 is the medium of instruction rather than a separate <u>subject</u> which might "turn the students off". Formal discussion of persistent problems areas in pronunciation (e.g., aspiration of voiceless stops) and grammar (e.g., gender agreement) might be introduced in later grades.

9) In grade 1, native speakers of L2 may be introduced into the classroom to provide native peer models of L2, to foster

interethnic interaction and friendship, and, in essence to make the program a two-way bilingual education program. For the native speakers of L2, it may be in actuality a native language program, at least at the outset.

10) In grade 1, all "homeroom" instruction is in L2 -- language arts, math, social studies, etc. Another teacher may take the children to another room or outside for physical education in L1.

11) In grade 2, language arts (reading, writing, etc.) are introduced in L1. Swain (1974) suggests that L1 reading could be delayed until grade 3 or 4.

12) By grade 5, content subjects like geography, geometry, or history may be introduced in L1 (e.g., one each year).

13) When attrition occurs (at whatever grade level), new monolingual L1-speaking children may be permitted to enter. The St. Lambert Project experience in Montreal has demonstrated that alert, well-motivated children can adapt successfully to the immersion model at all existing grade levels (currently K-7) (Personal communication with Dr. Wallace E. Lambert).

14) There should be strong support from the children's families concerning participation in the program.

The above 14 conditions have generally been met in the recent wave of successful immersion programs in North America. Even in the attitudinal domain, immersion programs have been seen to produce gains in terms of interethnic understanding (see Lambert and Tucker, 1972; Cohen and Lebach, 1974). Yet it would appear that perhaps 9 out of the 14 conditions are not being met in the English immersion programs, such as for Mexican Americans in the U.S. Southwest. They are points #1, #2, #3, #5, #7, #8, #11, #12, and #14.

First, the non-English-speaking student enters a kindergarten class where he may be met with native English speakers (perhaps even of his own ethnic background) who tease him for his imperfect English. He learns quickly what failure means. The teachers are not usually bilingual. Hence, the student may ask in L1 to go to the bathroom and the teacher ignores his request since he does not understand it. In some areas,

non-English speaking students have in the past been forbidden to use their native language at school and some are still discouraged from doing so. Teachers' expectations for academic success among non-English speaking students, particularly in the inner city, are not markedly high. Recently, studies on teacher expectation have indicated how such expectations are passed on to the students who perform accordingly (the self-fulfilling prophecy syndrome).

Non-English speaking students have often been "derailed" from the "normal track" because of many factors, including supposed language handicaps, supposed cognitive deficits, and the like. When the students have received L2 lessons (English as a second language), these lessons have usually involved a pull-out situation: the student is taken from the regular classroom into a special room and then engaged in special ESL lessons, often at the expense of progress in the content subjects. Often in the U.S., the non-English speaking student is not offered the option of becoming literate in his first language through formal instruction at school. Thus, he does not receive that kind of endorsement of his native language at school. Likewise, content subjects are not generally taught in the student's first language.

Finally, the non-English speaking parent may not express much support for the child's school program. There are many reasons for this, including long work hours, large families to care for, lack of knowledge of the educational system, a feeling that the educator knows best, and so forth. The English-speaking community often misinterpreted lack of involvement in school programs by non-English speakers as a lack of concern for educating their children. It may be more a matter of ethnic style, but perhaps in questions of language programs, actual parental involvement and visibility help to stimulate the children's motivation. The 6-month family English program for new immigrants to Israel provides a powerful kind of incentive for the child. He sees his parents studying Hebrew while he is. Often non-English speaking parents in an English speaking North American community do not have the time to study English.

There are other factors that <u>may</u> mitigate against the success of an immersion education program for a particular group of children. For example, it may be important for a student to feel linguistically secure in his native language and comfortable about its place in the community

before he enters such a program. If so, then a non-English speaker whose language and ethnic group are held in low prestige by the majority society may be at a disadvantage. Furthermore, an imperfect command of L2 when it has greater prestige in the community may result in teasing or other forms of embarrassment for the L1-speaking student.

It may also be the case that non-English speakers who reside in less affluent sections of the community, pick up nonstandard varieties of English, as well as negative attitudes toward "school" English. In these cases, learning of L2 out of school may possibly be at cross-purposes with L2-learning in school.

If negative factors such as those mentioned above apply to a given student population, then there may not be any way to successfully implement an immersion program. However, there is not as yet enough research evidence to say for certain the effect of these factors.

In any event, the advent of immersion education for the English-speaking child has proven a most exciting way for him not only to learn a second language, but to learn it well enough to speak it confidently with Spanish-and French-speaking students and to use Mexican American and French Canadian students as language models. Friendships have arisen almost spontaneously out of this arrangement, perhaps in a way that has not taken place in bilingual programs where the English speaker has <u>not</u> been immersed in L2.

It may well be that immersion education is going to spread throughout North America. However, its application in the education of non-English speaking students is still very much a research question and needs to be approached cautiously and systematically, drawing as much as possible on those ingredients that have made immersion work for the English-speaking child.

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